

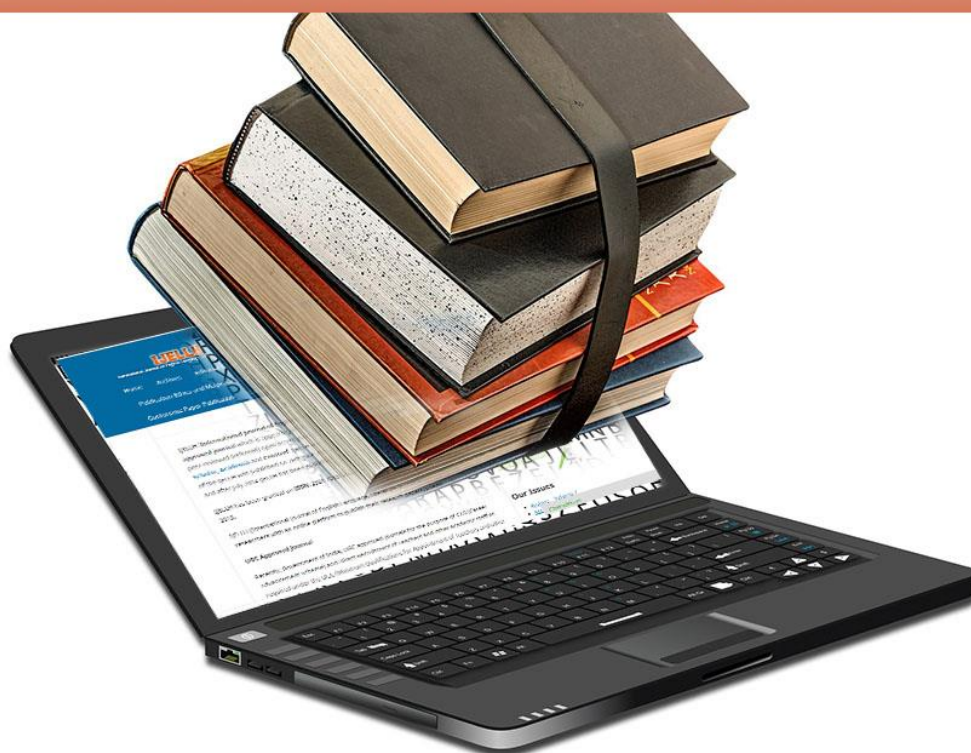
**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

**ISSN-2321-7065**

**IJELLH**

# **International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities**

**Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal**



**Volume 7, Issue 3, March 2019**

**[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)**

Dr.M.Samundeeswari,  
Associate Professor, Department Of English, UA,  
PSG College Of Arts & Science,  
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.  
chamusiva@gmail.com

HOME AND FAMILY OF WOMEN IN KINGSOLVER'S *THE BEAN TREES* AND *PIGS  
IN HEAVEN*: AN ECO-FEMINISTIC VIEW

Abstract

The memories of home generally include memories of family and the memories of the families are mostly established in the homes; the perceptions of these two notions are frequently interconnected and interdependent that one cannot isolate them. But to comprehend how Kingsolver tries to delineate these ideas, particularly in the light of eco-feminism, needs an estrangement of home and family. Agreeably, if ecology is the subject of both living organisms and their environments, then the subject of home and family should be analysed independently to finally illustrate the interdependence between them. In the novels, *The Bean Trees*, and *Pigs in Heaven*, the women protagonists should first learn to characterize their homes before they can start to understand their families, and how the idea of home provides understanding into their family life. Eventually, these characters happen to learn that home is that physical, spiritual place, that gives the individual a sense of belonging, stability, and rootedness. In addition, they find that home is more than a place located on a map; that it is a spiritual interconnection that connects individuals together, the origins that give sustenance when the individual is away from the physical point of the house. Home for these characters evolves into a spiritual interconnection to the Earth, the competence to live on and link to the land around them. The

environment, thus, which each woman finally learns to call home comes from an acute new perception that where she settles in life is not almost as significant as why she has settled there. This lesson becomes entrusting to the characters as they learn to overpower the hardships, personal and economic, they experience en route. In the novels of Kingsolver, these subthemes, of environmental devastation and minority maltreatment, become the focus for the characters' community commitment and their personal interpretations of home, which can be related to the origins of a tree, giving balance, stability and sustenance.

Keywords: Environment, Eco-Feminism, Family, Home, Women and Nature.

*The Bean Trees* features the experiences of Taylor as she quits Kentucky, adopts a Native American girl who is deserted in her car in Oklahoma, and moves west in pursuit of a new life for them both. Settling in Tucson, Taylor forms a new family for herself and daughter Turtle, together with the single mothers, expatriates, and elderly women who reside in her neighbourhood. *Pigs in Heaven* is published five-years after *The Bean Trees* and three-years after the second south-western fiction, *Animal Dreams*. Taylor's adoption of Turtle and her intimacy with expatriates incite her political enlightening to express her sense of alienation and alternate notion of citizenship. *Pigs in Heaven* and *The Bean Trees* are constructed by feminist understandings of community. In her examination of women's psychological evolution, the inclination for women to contemplate that if only they understand others, they will come to identify themselves and both *Pigs in Heaven* and *The Bean Trees* appear to substantiate the identity of Taylor resolved in the original novel by her interconnectedness with Turtle and the Tucson community, and in the later novel by her understanding of Turtle's requirement for her tribal clan.

At the end of *The Bean Trees*, Taylor urges Esperanza and Estevan to act as the parents of Turtle in order to ensure an adoption certificate, a move which intensifies prevalent insights

of transracial adoption. The colour of Esperanza's skin assures the influence of her acting as Turtle's "mother," anxious at giving in her daughter to Taylor but evidently persuaded that she cannot take care of her. This representative acting for the advantage of the adoption office misuses popular understandings of the economic impropriety of Native American parents. The skin colour of Esperanza and Estevan makes them appear "natural" with Turtle even while the scene's transracial adoption is regarded to be in the best concerns of girl. Taylor and Annawake's analysis about Turtle's custody inspire the reader to realize that adoption makes a parental interconnectedness that is not hereditary and drives either the definition of adoption or a redefinition of parenthood as a pretence or fiction. Albeit for various purposes, Taylor and Annawake admit the requirement for cultural and social families as well as biological interconnections when growing up a child, according to the Omaha tribe notion that it has an entire village to nurse a child. Both the women understand these cultural and social families variedly, but both of their ideas work outside the nuclear family of two parents. In the beginning, for the characters to realize and enjoy home is more than the places of their childhoods, they should be alienated from this place and encounter their own personal and economic hardships.

Life as a single mother in an unfamiliar and strange metropolitan becomes disappointing. Taylor arranges house in a hotel, the Republic, where people who are financially striving live. In illustrating the Republic, Kingsolver depends on the language of biology to express its meanness and to explicitly interconnect the experience of the individual to the broader community. After surviving in wretched poverty for some weeks, Taylor lives with another native of Kentucky, Lou Ann Ruiz, and together these two women start to construct a home life in which they bring up their children. Without Taylor's self-conscious perception of all that is occurring around her, she starts to construct a new home life alone, from the one she knows growing up, but still featured by the poverty trait of single motherhood that her own mother experienced. She holds a job in *Jesus Is Lord Used Tires* to raise Turtle and herself,

even though she is alarmed of tires. And this is where the elementary ideology of Kingsolver of the fundamentals of motherhood comes into action: making a home for a baby at any cost, with the essential stability required to make a protected environment. The small-house these women dwell becomes a microcosm of the greater American, North and Central, worlds, as different personalities, colours, and political perspectives exist together. This microcosm of community, yet, is changed in *Pigs in Heaven* as the focal point of the plot becomes the imbalance between the ethics of the white, homogenized community and the convictions of the Cherokee Nation.

For Taylor in *Pigs in Heaven*, the journey to home becomes tougher because she has once decided her origins in Tucson. When she takes to the road for the second time, her loss of cohesion and rootedness becomes even more destructive. She gets from her mother that all three of the Greer women, Taylor, Turtle and Alice, belong to the Cherokee Nation, however they live fully within the frontiers of the broader American community. In learning to encounter both cultures with the concurring of Alice with Cash Stillwater and the shared custody of Turtle, Taylor starts to look beyond what she has already known of home and to view this idea as something greater and more conventional than she ever concern viable. Taylor learns to view that her home with Jax is her anchor, but that her origins can expand wherever she requires them to meet the people she loves, even when she is forced to the most delineating critical situation of her life: the chance of losing her daughter. The plan of Taylor to move, to overthrow herself from her home, becomes dubious to Jax, her live-in suitor. And in illustrating his loss, Kingsolver depends on a nature-based portrayal to once again interconnect the personal to the natural environment: “Jax felt the small green tree that had been growing up in the center of their bed suddenly chopped back to the root” when Taylor left him (146). For funky careless Jax, Taylor is his centre, his guiding force. But his illustration of his loss turns precisely what Taylor is anticipating a sense of rootedness. The concept of losing Turtle trembles Taylor to her

very heart, displacing that which she has come to rely on her home. By the point the novel closes to an end, Taylor says Turtle: “‘that’s what home means, Turtle,’ she says. ‘Even if they get mad, they always have to take you back’” (289). Her journey into the very frightening portion of her soul the chance of losing her daughter gives Taylor a new perception of home and all that this word requires, along with encountering her own feelings. And in the conclusion, when she says Alice she is starting to view her affair with Jax as becoming more stable, Taylor genuinely finds her home: with Jax in Tucson, but with origins that can expand all the way to Oklahoma to meet her mother and her daughter. When Alice steps herself up to the chance of a life in Heaven with Cash, she recognizes that home, in the real sense of the word, means receiving love, cherishing her origins, and recompensing the recognition she reaps. With the Native American character of Cash, Kingsolver idealizes her portrayal of the Indian lifestyle while making her interpretation of home more further, admitting this idea to cover a structure and a group of people to the very earth on which humans live.

After the background of characters has been decided in *The Bean Trees*, the idea of home starts to evolve from the personal to the global. From an eco-feminist view, the poverty in which many single mothers are insisted to survive reflects the repression of women as a whole by the superior male power structure. This theme becomes focal point to the fiction as Taylor learns to perceive the interconnection between her own poverty and the condition of life she notices in the street-people around her. Taylor learns the eco-feminist directions that the helplessness of poor mothers, native people, and small children, has an explicit interdependence to the disaster of crops and the deterioration of the human spirit. There is a glimpse of hope in the novel that this cycle will end but only when individuals learn to free their minds to the experiences and significance of other people. But to accomplish that hope, Taylor should experience her own outrage at the predicament of native people in her own backyard, as she learns to interconnect her own experiences to those of other ill-fated people.

The lessons of Taylor of home, yet, are just starting by the time *The Bean Trees* closes, as home has come to mean Tucson, Arizona, with all of its unique life structures, both woman and nature. But upon arriving at the Cherokee Nation to adopt Turtle, Taylor also reaches her own familial homeland as she reminds her great-grandmother's Cherokee blood she bears. But for Annawake, in *Pigs in Heaven*, the interpretation of home for tribes is tough to pin down. Ultimately she states: "There's no getting away from the people that love you" (50), manifesting the emotional bond on which homes are constructed. But for the disintegrated Cherokee community, home and family are challenging conceptions to understand and interpret due to the organised deterioration of the Native American lifestyle. For tribes discusses on community, there have been dangerous risks to their lifestyle, which could describe how Turtle slipped through the system. Annawake explains Alice:

What's happened to us is that our chain of caretaking got interrupted. My mom's generation... Federal law put them in boarding school. Cut off their hair, taught them English, taught them to love Jesus, and made them spend their entire childhoods in a dormitory. They got to see their people maybe twice a year. Family has always been our highest value, but that generation of kids never learned how to be in a family. The past got broken off. (227)

With the optimistic influences of her mother and her mother's values, Taylor learns to trust her own convictions and her competence, which admit her self-reliance she requires to head out on her own in search of her own life and her own identity. In addition redefining the clichéd image of the family structure, Kingsolver throws in Guatemalan expatriates into the picture, linking them to the smaller culture of Native Americans. As her surrogate mother, Mattie teaches Taylor in learning to celebrate the nature around her, to value the Earth as a living being, and to appreciate the revival of the resources of the Earth, having nature as a part of the family of Taylor. In *The Bean Trees*, Mattie leads Estevan and Taylor to the desert just before a tornado.



Family is a tribe, a group of people who are interdependent with one another for fundamental requirements as well as happiness. With the Cherokee Nation, Alice learns to espouse her own Cherokee origins; she educates Taylor that it is naturally significant to Turtle learn about her background and that this learning will in no means influence the role of Taylor as the mother of Turtle. These tribes that Alice finds are an evident parallel of the new expanded family of Taylor which covers the Guatemalan expatriates. The immediate family, for these characters, instantaneously propels into the world. The essence of *Pigs in Heaven* addresses Taylor's illegitimate adoption of Turtle, while simultaneously addressing a fundamental dogma of ecofeminism: "we are all connected ...Dark and light, Male and female. We are a tribe whose fate on this earth is shared" (20) says Griffin in *Made from This Earth: An Anthology of Writings*. The problem of individual versus community rears to the vanguard of the discussion in *Pigs in Heaven*. Annawake says Taylor that Turtle "needs her tribe, too. There are a lot of things she'll need growing up that you can't give her" (77). For the Native American, community is family; for Taylor, symbolising the Western view, family is made up of individuals. No woman is competent of viewing both sides of the problem because each is in the axis of the fight. The cultural view of each woman prescribes her viewpoint and her incompetence to appreciate and endorse the others.

And for Sugar, obviously, family is the rhizobia feeding the wisteria vines, admitting the individual to flourish due to the rootedness and stability home and family give. There is no hierarchical form of family, no individual ranks above the others as each and every community member is required to protect the conventional ways of life and family. But in order for Sugar to learn this, she has to move to the reservation, demand her family's Cherokee history, and receive her position in her new community and expanded family. In admitting these roles, Sugar espouses the legacy of her family, the culture of her husband, and learns to take control of her family as a Cherokee woman. And this moves the heart of Kingsolver's perception of the role



of family in the life of the individual: it is not elemental to be the very ample member of one's community, just an active member.

Taylor, in *Pigs in Heaven*, holds this concept of interdependent yet interconnected people as family and further expands it. Once she reaches Heaven, Oklahoma, Taylor learns that family is constituted of people who concern about and for one another in the very purposeful manner. Home and family fuse together at the end of this novel as the characters infuse themselves into the lives of each other, empower their positive attitudes on one another, and finally work to view that every member of the community are well-nursed. Once the protagonists of these novels understand to interpret their homes and their families, the slices of their identities start to scatter into place. The characters perceive to look themselves as whole, taking their responsibilities as family, mothers, and community members, and their interconnectedness and interdependence to the universe at large. Finally, they learn to accept the responsibility of their lives, the lives of people who depend on them, and their own understandings of self. The repression of the fragile Cherokee Nation at the hands of the very mighty American government, going back as far as the Trail of Tears, is identical to the devastation of the nature, the Cherokee's treasure. All spiritual, cultural, and ancestral interconnections have been disrupted in the name of absorption. The elemental origins that could relate the tribes to their heritage, their land, and their cultures have been demolished by the white, male, power centre usual of America, which cannot start to pinpoint a community where children are brought up by expanded family members in matriarchal structures, and mentally-challenged individuals are not only motivated, but guarded in high respect. But, because characters like Annawake become so engaged in the legislatures and cultures of the Nation, there is dream that future generations will appreciate the elemental features of home: admiration for the community members, the land, and the emotional origins that interconnect one life to another. Addressing humanistic individuals as the base for communities, families and

alternate national identities, *Pigs in Heaven* and *The Bean Trees* adjust with the metaphor of the rhizobia which endures the bean vines to cite the interdependence and interconnectedness of human characteristics.

In writing about the treatment of Native American tribes or the environment, Kingsolver's political idea is the target, and her characters are the symbolic figures in her tales. As feminist analyst Elizabeth Spellman in *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* proposes, "Those of us with privilege may find it very handy to parlay our embarrassment at having it into a prodigious preoccupation with revealing and exterminating it... We make our sins the most interesting and pressing thing to talk about: so we are still center stage" (5). The communities of women become support structures and surrogate family members. Family and familial relationships become elemental to periodic survival. And from an eco-feminist outlook, the transformation to a matriarchal perspective of life is the empowering energy that keeps these women progress. Because Kingsolver goes against conventional perspectives of family with men at the helms, or even as active members, she is backing the idea that the competences of her characters to interconnect and interdependent with nature and with other human beings especially women are elemental to life, not the masculine attitudes of dominance, work, and repression.

## Works Cited

- Adams, Carol J. and Lori Gruen. *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals & the Earth*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Birkeland, Janis. "Eco-feminism: Linking Theory and Practice." *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Ed. Greta Gaard. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993. 13-59.
- DeMarr, Mary Jean. *Barbara Kingsolver: A Critical Companion*. London: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Griffin, Susan. *Made From This Earth: An Anthology of Writings*. New York: Harper, 1982.
- King, Ynestra. "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology." *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Eco-feminism*. Ed. Judith Plant. Philadelphia: New Society, 1989. 18-28.
- Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Bean Trees*. New York: Harper Collins, 1988.
- . *Pigs in Heaven*. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.
- Pence, Amy. "An Interview with Barbara Kingsolver." *Poets & Writers* (1993): 19-21.
- Spretnak, Charlene. "Eco-feminism: Our Roots and Flowering." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Eco-feminism*. Eds. Irene Diamond & Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 3-14.
- SPELMAN, E. V. (1988). *Inessential woman: problems of exclusion in feminist thought*. Boston, Beacon Press.
- Warren, Karen J. ed. *Eco-feminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997.
- Wagner-Martin, Linda. *Great Writers: Barbara Kingsolver*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2004.

---. *Barbara Kingsolver's World: Nature, Art, and the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. 8-28.

Zabinski, Catherine. "Scientific Ecology and Ecological Feminism: The Potential for Dialogue." *Eco-feminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Ed. Karen J. Warren. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997. 314-326.